

Friends of the Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcestershire) Newsletter No. 3

January 2014



Mercian Regiment

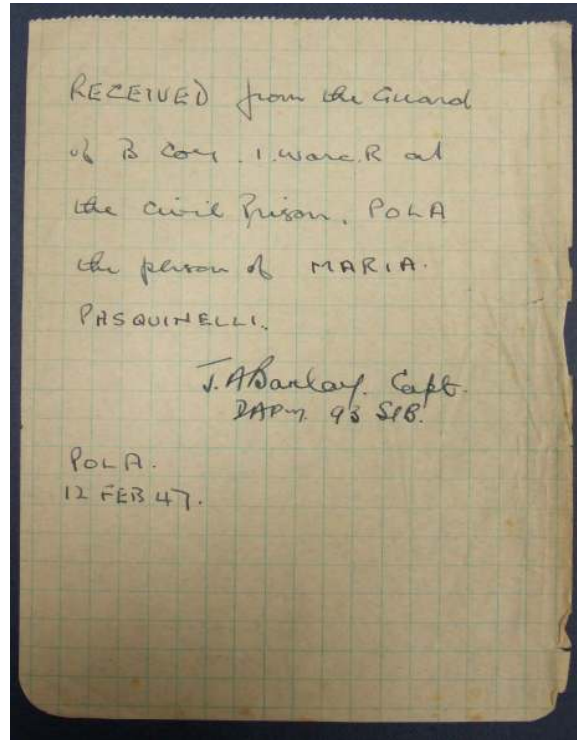


**Worcestershire &
Sherwood Foresters
Regiment**



Worcestershire Regiment

• News



As a footnote to the news item in the last Newsletter about the recent death of Maria Pasquinelli who was sentenced to death in 1947 for assassinating Brig. Robert De Winton, this document has turned up in the archives relating to her arrest by B Company of the First Battalion The Worcs. Regiment.

Accreditation

Excellent news: the Museum has once again been awarded full Accreditation by the Arts Council England. Accreditation is the national UK standard for museums and galleries. It defines good practice and identifies agreed standards, thereby encouraging development. It is a baseline quality standard that helps guide museums to be the best they can be, for current and future users. The submission was a lot of hard work and congratulations are due to everyone who contributed to it, in particular the trustees, with especial thanks to the Chairman for all his support.

Public Relations

On 8th November, John Lowles appeared on BBC *Midlands Today* following the announcement of the award of a major Lottery Grant to **Worcestershire World War 100** (a consortium of cultural organisations and visitor attractions in Worcestershire) for the organisation of exhibitions and events to commemorate the First World War. He was filmed examining items from the Museum's collection of archives and used the opportunity to make an appeal to the public at large to donate any letters, diaries, printed documents, photographs and other ephemera, as well as items of equipment and uniform that are not represented in the collections already.

• ***From the Curator***

I can't believe that I have been working here for a year already. The time has gone so very quickly, I have obviously been having too much fun!! (Don't tell the Trustees). I have been extremely fortunate in the support I have received from the Trustees and our outstanding body of volunteers. I am often astounded by their knowledge, commitment and generosity of spirit and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their help and tolerance on what has been an exciting but steep learning curve for me. This year has had many highlights for me personally, but two in particular stand out, one being the granting of accreditation reported above:

The Brown Bess

The astonishing generosity of one of our Friends, Roger Christian, (seen in the photograph presenting the musket to our Chairman of Trustees, John Lowles,) has enabled the Mercian Regiment Museum to purchase a very special British India Pattern 'Brown Bess' flintlock musket and associated bayonet. The India Pattern was a simplified and shorter version of the 1770s Short Land Pattern musket and was supplied to all line regiments of the British Army from 1797. It was armed with this pattern of musket, therefore, that the 29th and 36th Regiments covered themselves in glory during the Peninsular War and in doing so earned the battle honours of *Rolica, Vimiero, Corunna, Talavera, Albuera, Salamanca, Nivelle, Nive, Orthez, Pyrennes and Toulouse.*

The musket's effective range was between 50 and a hundred yards. It fired a lead ball of 0.75" calibre (approximately 18mm) and in the hands of a trained British infantryman it was capable of firing three rounds per minute, although the smoke generated by the first shot would have rendered any further accuracy thereafter unlikely.

This musket is quite simply one of the finest Brown Besses I have seen! It has a beautifully figured stock, unusual in an ordnance piece. It is 55 ½" long with a 39" barrel marked with ordnance proof marks, (*a crowned GR and a crown over crossed sceptres.*) The barrel is equipped with a standing foresight and a plain rear sight. The musket has the standard side action lock, engraved with a Crown over GR (*Georgius Rex*) the tail of the lock being stamped '*TOWER*'. The lock also bears a *crowned broad arrow*, the Board of Ordnance viewing mark. It is equipped with a ring-necked cock, which dates the musket to the period after 1810.



The musket has an "India pattern" walnut full stock, with brass furniture including regulation butt cap and trigger guard, a plain brass fore-end cap for socket bayonet and three ramrod pipes retaining the original ramrod. The ramrod bears the same markings (*RF A 26*) as the butt plate! The musket has two sling swivels, one mounted from the trigger guard, the other above the front ramrod tube. It will go on display in the museum early in the New Year, as soon as a mount has been made for it!

- **From the Archives**

Meerut Theatre

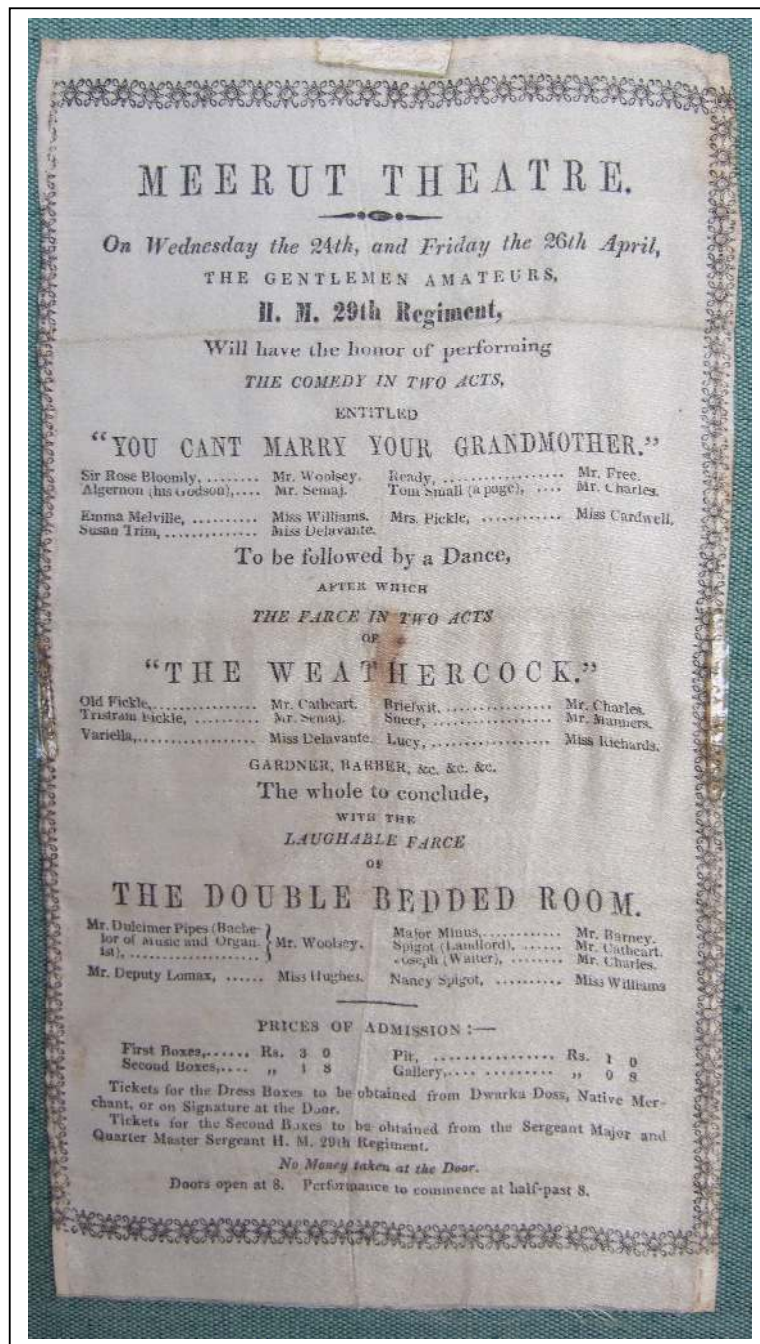
The Gentlemen Amateurs: H M 29th Regiment

While the regiment was stationed in Meerut, in India in 1924, life was not entirely taken up with Regimental duties. A small handbill, printed on silk, tells of other talents displayed by the officers who had to make their own entertainment.

A playwright among them must have had a wicked sense of humour as three comedies were performed on each of two evenings in April 1924, entitled 'You Can't Marry Your Grandmother', followed by a Dance, and 'The Weathercock', advertised as 'a farce' and included characters such as Old Fickle, Briefwit and Sneer. Even racier, 'The Double Bedded Room' followed which features five male actors and one female, a certain Nancy Spigot played by Miss Williams, and was labelled 'a laughable farce': the mind boggles!

Tickets for the Dress boxes could be obtained from Dwarka Doss, Native Merchant, and were the princely sum of three shillings, whereas second boxes cost a mere one shilling and eight pence, the Pit one shilling and the Gallery was priced at only eight pence. If only the scripts had survived!

HAVE YOU ANY EPHEMERA RELATING TO THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT THAT SHOULD BE IN THE MUSEUM?



Permission to marry ... or not!

Wise words on the subject of Marriage from Lt-Col C Wyndham of the 36th Regiment in 1829, printed in his *Abstract of the Interior System and Economy of Companies transcribed for the Information and Guidance of the 36th Regiment*.

"It cannot be too often repeated to the men, that they are, upon no account, to marry without permission. – The inconveniences which arise, and the evils which follow a Regiment encumbered with women, together with the poverty and misery which are the inevitable consequences, prove, that Officers cannot do too much to deter their men from marrying. A man marrying without leave from the Commanding Officer of the Regiment, is not to be permitted to receive any of the indulgences bestowed on such as marry by consent."

• **Recollections**

A daring escape

Capt 'Bill' Bowen and Lieut Richard Weeks were members of the 1st Battalion The Worcestershire Regt who were taken prisoner at Tobruk in 1942. They were moved to a POW camp in Italy shortly afterwards. After the Italian surrender in September 1943 the Germans started moving POWs to camps in Germany.

On 2nd October the prisoners from Chieti were bundled into enclosed cattle trucks for the journey north. Each truck held about 35 prisoners and every fourth truck had an armed German guard in an observation box overlooking the top of the train. It was not long before some of the POWs started planning to escape by making a hole in the floor of the truck. There were few tools for the job but they set to with a small hacksaw blade, which soon broke, and some table knives which they used as chisels. It was slow and painful work but during the first day and night they made some progress. On the evening of the second day they finally managed to lever up two floorboards. Richard Weeks takes up the story:

"Our journey had been interrupted several times by shooting (following attempts to escape). Now the train stopped again, and the Boche made yet another tour of inspection. I was sitting beside our hole at the time, and I suddenly heard two sentries creeping about directly

underneath us. Every word they uttered came up through the hole so clearly that I moved a little away from it, thinking they might investigate it with a bayonet.

All at once I saw a torch beam being directed upon the coat that covered the hole. We expected a burst of indignant and triumphant noises, but none came and we heard the sentries' feet crunching over the stones as they went away. The train shortly afterwards rumbled forward again, and we were left in an excruciating uncertainty of mind. Some, even among those who had partaken in the project, considered our plan was useless. They thought it was certainly discovered. They were suspicious of the fact that no outcry had followed the incident, and supposed there must be some plan afoot to shoot us in the act of escaping. Of the rest there seemed no one who would readily commit himself to making an attempt until there had been further developments. Bill and I therefore, as the train laboured on, declared ourselves willing, if the hole was not revisited at the next stop, to go out first at the next stop but one. To our great relief nobody objected to this proposal; we were both heartily sick of the suspense, which looked like being the worst part of the whole undertaking.



Captain Bill Bowen drawn by Donald Nott



Lieut. Richard Weeks

When the train stopped again, it was on the discovery of the truck behind ours being broken out of, and some three or four escaped. A tumultuous shouting of Boche guards drew near and all but the escaped occupants of the incriminated truck were unceremoniously hustled, with many threats and warnings, into ours. In spite of all this commotion we were able to notice that our manhole had not been inspected again.

Some time later the train began to slow down jerkily, before stopping at a small halt. Someone who was looking out at one of the grilles reported that there was little sign of movement apart from that the sentries who had as usual dismounted to keep watch from each side of the line. There was no time to lose. Bill wriggled through the hole and disappeared. I followed him out, afraid all the time of being jammed in the hole when the train restarted. But I dragged myself clear at last and stepped gingerly onto the loose stone chippings beneath.

Crouching behind the wheel, I looked round for Bill whom I saw clinging to the substructure of the truck. Five yards away was standing a sentry talking to the driver of the train and I found myself watching him as if he were an image on a cinema screen, with that kind of cool detachment which is very remote from conscious *sang froid* for it is involuntary and usually attends (or so I have found) moments of grave danger. Suddenly the train gave a jolt. The sentry hurriedly swung on board. Bill dropped onto the sleepers and we both flattened ourselves between the lines, keeping as low as we could. I remember that as we did so I thoughtlessly set my hand on the line, but by good luck withdrew it just as the slowly rolling rear wheel of the truck was about to crush it. The thought of it is none too pleasant now, but at the time my mind did little more than record it as a bald fact. There were indeed other matters to think of; the train was rapidly gathering speed and projections beneath it were bruising my shoulders, making me shrink close up against the line. It is useless to attempt to describe my feelings as the train clattered over our heads faster and faster. It will be enough to remark that I cannot think of it now without the palms of my hands growing moist.

Moreover, an hour or two before, as the train rounded a bend going up a steep gradient, someone had called out that there was a locomotive attached to the rear. Several halts had been made after that, during one of which it had been supposed it had been taken off, but it had never been established for certain. These locomotives were fitted with a cowcatcher at each end, and if the auxiliary had not been removed a very unpleasant finish to our adventure would not have been many seconds away. It required the utmost self control to lie still; to move would have been fatal.

As it turned out the auxiliary had been taken off, but a coach at the rear had a very small clearance indeed. As it passed over us something struck me heavily on the back of the head and crushed my face into the sharp stones between the lines. A hundred swimming lights burst forth in front of my eyes, but even so I was able to raise my head to see the tail lamp of the train receding into the night and was able to savour the full joy of that first moment of freedom for a year and a half".

*FOOTNOTE: The caricature of Bill Bowen used in this article is copied from the log of Donald Nott which he kept while a prisoner of war. Major Nott was captured at the fall of Tobruk and was held first in Libya, then in Italy, and finally in Germany. His journal is entitled **Mud and Stars: A Wartime Log of a British prisoner, one Donald Nott, the Worcestershire Regiment**. The log is not a diary as such, but a series of poems and accounts of life in the prison camps. It includes sketched portraits of a number of fellow prisoners. The log is owned by the late Donald Nott's family.*

Do YOU have an amusing, frivolous, or deadly serious recollection of your time in the Regiment? Please put pen to paper – or finger to computer - and send your memories to waoddy@gmail.com

● **Developing the Collections**

Museums acquire objects in two ways – by gift (or bequest) from interested members of the public or by purchase from dealers or private owners. Gifts and bequests are sometimes the result of serendipity and sometimes the result of campaigns to ‘woo’ owners who are known to have items relevant to the collections. Purchases are usually the result of regular searching the web sites of militaria dealers and the catalogues of auction houses by the curator or volunteers. Even if the museum cannot afford to buy everything that is relevant, it is useful to know what is out there. One recent acquisition was.....

Admired by the Prince of Wales



Dr Robert Bomford recently visited the museum and presented this broad-sword and a book of the letters of three members of his family who had served in the First World War which had been edited by his cousin Mr Nicholas Bomford. The broad-sword marked with a label 'Taken from a POW in Italy' had been captured by his father Leslie Bomford who was commissioned into The Worcestershire Regiment in 1915 aged 19 and joined the 1/8th Battalion in France in January 1916. From then until December 1918, when he was severely wounded, he was promoted to Captain, commanded a company and was awarded the DSO, MC and Bar and was twice Mentioned in Despatches. He acquired the broad-sword in June 1918 following a successful counter-attack during which the Battalion took 162 prisoners, 40 of whom were wounded. On seeing the broad-sword in the museum, Patrick Love, who has done much research on the Volunteers and Territorial Army, immediately turned up the following quote by Lieutenant Colonel HT Clarke, the Commanding Officer:

'The prisoners consisted of various races, Austrians, Hungarians, Bosnians and Herzegovinians, and their antipathy towards each other was remarkable - they spat at each other, and unwounded prisoners would not carry a wounded one of another race on a stretcher until shown the business end of a bayonet by one of our escort. Two of the prisoners were Herzegovinian stretcher bearers, over six feet tall, who, much to our surprise, were armed with enormous broad-swords, perhaps for the purpose of amputating a

wounded limb! When the Prince of Wales called at the 1/8th Battalion HQ the following day he greatly admired one of these broad-swords, but refused to accept it as a souvenir, as he said it rightly belonged to the CO of the Battalion.'

Acquisitions in 2013

- WOSWR: 2013-1 Marriage certificate of Pte Joseph Chamberlain and the Birth Certificate of his daughter Madeline 15th Worcestershire Regiment 1914-18
- WOSWR: 2013-2 Certificate of Service of Cpl Frank Chadwick and Certificate of Transfer to Army Reserves 1914-18
- WOSWR: 2013-3 Biographical information regarding Michael Allum Sergeant in the 29th Foot
- WOSWR: 2013-4 Embroidered White Linen Tablecloth. 1914-18
- WOSWR: 2013-5 British 1839 pattern musket – Sikh Wars
- WOSWR: 2013-6 'India' pattern Brown Bess flintlock musket - Napoleonic Wars
- WOSWR: 2013-7 Queens South Africa Medal and details of his South African Service of Pte Siddons G.

WOSWR: 2013-8 to WOSWR: 319 have been used for entering items from the archives that were not registered when they were first acquired

- WOSWR: 2013-320 Medals and biographical details of Pte John Hayes DCM including newspaper cuttings and "Queen Mary Christmas Tin" 1914-18
- WOSWR: 2013-321 Letters, diaries and biographical details of L.Cpl. Reginald Harry Patterson 1914-18
- WOSWR: 2013-322 Collection of eight trench maps, one brass regimental plaque and an Austrian stretcher bearer's sidearm captured at Asiago Italy by L R Bomford MC 1/8th Battalion 1914-18



Lock plate of the 'Brown Bess' musket (WOSWR: 2013-6) (left and illustrated on p.2 above) compared with the Lock Plate of the Sikh Wars Musket (WOSWR: 2013-5) (right and illustrated in Newsletter no.2) demonstrating the change from a flintlock ignition system to provide the spark to the more reliable percussion system. Both muskets were muzzle loaded using a ramrod to drive the ball down the barrel onto the charge.

● ***The Friends' Programme for 2014***

The Friends now has an acting committee consisting of:

President	John Lowles
Chairman	Keith Jeavons
Treasurer	vacant
Secretary and membership secretary	Bob Prophet
Meetings organiser and newsletter editor	Andrew Oddy
Curator	John Paddock

This committee will act until the AGM in 2015. Meanwhile, three meetings have been arranged for 2014. All will take place at Dancox House, the home of the Museum offices. There is a multi-storey car park next door that is accessed from Pheasant Street.

Thursday 14th March 2014

18.15 AGM Please attend the AGM to have your say about the future direction of the Friends.

19.00 A lecture by Lt.Col. Brian Clarke on ***THE 29th IN THE PENINSULAR WAR*** to mark the end of this conflict 200 years ago in April 1814.

Thursdayday 22nd May 2014.

19.00 A SHOW AND TELL session when the curator, Dr John Paddock, and colleagues will talk about objects from the stores that are not normally on display. There will be an opportunity to examine some of the objects.

November 2014 – date to be confirmed

19.00 A lecture on the *BATTLE OF GHELUVELT* and its context

PLEASE NOTE THESE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- **More from the Archives**

Red Dye for uniforms from the Wilson Letters

Captain Alexander Wilson, the Regimental Agent in the 1730s, seems to have been kept extremely busy for not only was he constantly concerned about regimental affairs but other demands were placed upon him by certain officers. Without the benefit of photocopiers, Wilson spent time copying out correspondence into a notebook. Here we read that, although our Colonel William Kennedy (see Newsletter 2) was too afflicted with gout to leave his home in Scotland, he was still sufficiently on the ball when it came to making sound investments!

Dealings with *Messrs Bowman Son and Main, Merchants of Cadiz* were frequent: one letter dated 15th January 1730 details the Bills of Exchange for 550 pounds which were being used to create a fund of 3000 dollars 'which you order us to lend for your account as Risque on the present Galeons now dispatching from hence (Gibraltar) for Carthagena'. 'Last week the Exchange for London was at 44 Dollars & we believe it will continue at that price for some time or rise higher, large parcels of **Cochineal having been lately bought which will occasion considerable drafts**'. On the 11th February 1730 another letter acknowledged the receipt of the £550 but complained about the slow dispatch of the Galeons due to the 'usual dilatory proceedings of the Spaniards' and added that it was unlikely those ships would not be ready to sail until May!!

So why was William Kennedy speculating in cochineal? The answer is scarlet dye used for officers' uniforms was carmine made from the crushed bodies of the female cochineal beetle which contain about 20% of the dye when dry. (The dye for other ranks tunics was the cheaper madder.) It takes about 80,000 to 100,000 insects to make one kilogram of cochineal dye.



Female Cochineal Insect



Officer of the 29th Foot in the later 18th century

Sadly the Wilson letters do not record the outcome of William Kennedy's speculation.

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